

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCA-01 PRS-01 SSO-00 L-02 H-02

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P 121215Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIOTIY 8032

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON AREA CHARTER GROUP STRANDED

1. DEPARTMENT MAY RECEIVE INQUIRIES ABOUT WELFARE OF GENERAL TOURS GROUP OF ABOUT 162 PERSONS, MOSTLY FROM WASHINGTON AREA, WHOSE AEROFLOT CHARTER FLIGHT TO LENINGRAD WAS DIVERTED TO MOSCOW'S SHEREMETEVO AIRPORT LATE AFTERNOON MARCH 11 BECAUSE OF LENINGRAD WEATHER CONDITIONS. AEROFLOT HOPED TO PROCEED TO LENINGRAD AFTER SHORT DELAY, BUT WAS UNABLE TO DO SO UNTIL ABOUT 10 A.M. MARCH 12 AND GROUP SPENT UNCOMFORTABLE NIGHT IN SHEREMETEVO AIRPORT AND TRANSIT FACILITIES. INTOURIST FOUND BEDS FOR ABOUT 20 OF MORE ELDERLY IN AIRPORT TRANSIT HOSTEL, BUT MOST HAD TO SIT UP OR TRY TO SLEEP ON COUCHES IN LOUNGES OVERNIGHT.

2. EMBASSY DUTY OFFICER WENT TO SHEREMETEVO MIDDLE OF NIGHT TO PROVIDE MORAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH AIRPORT STAFF. GROUP SPIRITS GENERALLY IMPROVED, BUT MANY MEMBERS INCAPABLE UNDERSTANDING WHY HOTEL ROOMS, ETC. WERE NOT IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVE.

3. COMMENT: AS USUAL IN SUCH INSTANCES, MANY OF STRANDED TRAVELLERS WERE IRATE AND FRUSTRATED AS WELL AS UNCOMFORTABLE. AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, SHEREMETEVO TRANSIT FACILITIES HAVE GOOD RESTAURANT BY SOVIET STANDARDS AND SPACIOUS LOUNGE IN PRE-DEPARTURE AREA, BUT NO SLEEPING ACCOMMODATIONS

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CONSIDERED ADEQUATE BY AMERICAN STANDARDS AND ONLY A VERY

SMALL TRANSIT HOSTEL, GENERALLY USED FOR TRANSIENTS WITHOUT VISAS AND PERSONS IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION. THERE IS CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF HOTEL ROOMS IN MOSCOW, AND EVEN IN MARCH INTOURIST WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY PLACING 162 PERSONS SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY. ALSO, GENERAL TOURS AND OTHER TRAVEL COMPANIES SELL SUCH GROUP TOURS FOR VERY LITTLE, REPORTEDLY \$500 TO \$600 PER PERSON, AND WITH SMALL PROFIT MARGIN GENERAL TOURS AND INTOURST CANNOT EASILY REARRANGE ITINERARIES UNEXPECTEDLY WITHOUT ADDING TO COSTS AND OBLIGATING PROFITS.

STOESSEL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: WELFARE & WHEREABOUTS, TOURISM, SUPPLEMENTAL AIRLINES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975MOSCOW03285
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750086-0650
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750359/aaaacakt.tel
Line Count: 71
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SCS
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11 JUN 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <12 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WASHINGTON AREA CHARTER GROUP STRANDED
TAGS: CASC, PFOR, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006